

The Air We Breathe

South East queens Located adjacent to the JFK airport is perceived to be the target of air pollutants from the JFK Airport and associated industries. The area has a concentration of transportation airport-related industries and a significant absence of green spaces. Summer evenings are sometimes interrupted by the permeating odors of jet fuel. Airplanes and other combustion source engines are a recognized source of particulates.

- Are the particulates in the southeast queen's neighborhood at a level that can impact the health of our residents?
- Are there chemicals associated with these particulates?
- What are these chemicals associated with the particulates?
- Do these chemicals have a negative impact on the health of the residents in Southeast Queens and other areas in the immediate vicinity of the airport?

The residents of the Southeast Queens' neighborhood would appreciate answers to the above questions. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation does monitor air pollutants in the New York City area. It is questionable as whether or not the monitoring provides an adequate picture of the situation in Southeast Queens. The monitoring stations located in Maspeth and Flushing are a considerable distance from the source of the pollutants. It is arguable that there is significant dilution and fallout occurring before reaching the measuring sites. The recorded information then does not reflect the immediate area. This lends support to the argument that the Eastern Queens Alliance has been making for monitoring in the areas immediate to all significant sources of the pollution in the vicinity.

The health effects caused by air pollutants can be minor to major respiratory problems. NYC has a higher rate of hospitalizations due to asthma (NYC Asthma Facts 2nd Edition 2003) than the rest of the US. The same document provides data indicating a fall off of asthma hospitalizations in the Southeast Queens area. Is this really the case, or are we seeing the result of a seeming *no confidence in the health care systems belief* among many in these areas? It is known among the residents that if you have private insurance, then you would go to nearby hospitals in long island instead of those in the city. The Southeast Queens' residents are more likely to utilize nearby long island hospitals such as Franklyn General and Long Island Jewish instead of a city hospital. Does this mean then that there is not an adequate capture of those hospitalizations for Asthma or other illness related to air pollution?

Particulates originating from diesel or similar combustion are believed to be associated with a variety of mutagenic and carcinogenic chemicals including polyaromatic hydrocarbons and nitroarenes. Studies in rats have found that diesel exhaust can produce neoplastic and inflammatory responses. The particles from such emissions have been shown to be in the 2.5 micron to 5.0 micron range. A particle size that can easily penetrate the lower level of alveoli and does great damage to lung tissue.

The Eastern Queens Alliance has been calling for substantive answers to the above-raised questions. In the *Eastern Queens Alliance White Paper: A Comprehensive Plan—Maiximizing Quality of Life in Southeast Queens* published in 2005, the Alliance calls for high quality community health care facilities for community residents. It calls for mandated, regular, on-going monitoring of the hazardous air pollutants in Southeast Queens and reduction of the same. It is also calls for the establishment and strict enforcement of regulations aimed at encouraging efficient and less polluting vehicles in the area. The Alliance urges the city and transportation agencies to introduce natural gas and/or hybrid vehicles for passenger vehicles, buses and trucks throughout the commercial and industrial areas. It also takes the position that Federal laws must require less-polluting upgrades on aircraft frequently flying into non-attainment areas like Kennedy and LaGuardia, especially in close proximity to residential areas. In addition, the Alliance is calling for the Department of Health to focus on the causes and prevention of respiratory illnesses in areas in close proximity to major industrial pollution sources.

Currently, the Alliance is designing a community air quality study and is seeking to partner with a local university in the implementation of this effort.

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